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Turner Likens CIA to 'Family Business'

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WASHINGTON — CIA Director Stansfield Turner says the intelligence agency had been "run like a family business" for 30 years until he took over and decided to clean out 820 senior agents.



Stansfield Turner

In defending those controversial dismissals, Turner implicitly criticized several recent directors — including George Bush, William Colby and Richard Helms, who went along with what Turner called "familial" operation of the CIA.

Turner said when he took over nearly a year ago the CIA was overloaded with officials who came in at the height of the "Cold War" 30 years ago and stayed, blocking advancement of younger agents.

The 820 headquarters agents whose dismissal or early retirement he ordered last fall were "people who sit there and clog the intelligence system," Turner said.

RESPONDING TO reports that he has caused serious morale problems at the CIA, the former Navy admiral who was President Carter's Annapolis classmate said: "If you want happy spies you just go along with the system. I want efficient and effective spies, so I had to make a tough personnel decision."

In another rap at previous intelligence chiefs, Turner said the several defense and central intelligence agencies "never before sat down" and coordinated their activities. Under a Carter reorganization, Turner has over-all responsibility for all intelligence activities as well as heading the CIA.

Turner said he has made three other major changes:

1. The CIA has "broadened its focus" to other areas of the world instead of "concentrating on the Soviet Union alone."

2. Covert operations, the so-called cloak-and-dagger spy missions, have been substantially reduced, while analysis functions have been increased. Carter has signed an order establishing "special controls" over covert operations, and new laws require "timely" disclosure to congressional committees.

3. The news media have been given greater access to the CIA and its director.

"My openness has resulted in greater public appreciation of the intelligence community," Turner said.

Bush, who was CIA director from 1975 to 1977, disputed Turner's critique of past operations. He said the agency had been staffed by "dedicated and very capable people," and that changes were being made continually in upper echelon personnel.

Bush refused to comment on the record about Turner's leadership of the agency.

This week's issues of Newsweek, Time and U.S. News and World Report are dominated by interviews and pictures of Turner, and coverage of U.S. intelligence activities. Also, Turner allowed a television network to film inside the CIA for the first time.

In his meeting Tuesday with Washington bureau chiefs and political writers, Turner said:

1. The Soviet Union has "operational capability" to shoot down U.S. satellites, but he refused to say if their capability extended far out in space. Defense Secretary Harold Brown disclosed as much last fall.

2. The Soviet Union, unable to compete with the United States in the economic and political fields, is using military means for political leverage around the world, including Africa, Cuba and the Middle East. He sees "no sign of surcease" in those activities.

3. The new Communist regime ruling Cambodia appears to be "irrational" in the "unbelievable massacre" of its own citizens and in "knocking the chip off the shoulder" of neighboring communist Vietnam. The two countries recently engaged in border fighting that appears to have subsided, he said.

TURNER WAS harshly critical of former CIA agent Frank Snepp, whose book, "Decent Interval," accused the CIA of abandoning native agents in South Vietnam.

"He is not an honorable man," Turner said. He said Snepp broke a promise to submit the book for CIA review before publishing it. Turner said Random House and CBS, which published and publicized the book, "are also culpable."

Turner said his main complaint about Snepp's book is that agents still living in Vietnam can be identified by other intelligence services.